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ABSTRACT

Cross-cultural studies of Asian and American children suggest that the superior performance of Asian children in school settings is related to cultural and educational differences beginning in the home. In an effort to understand why Japanese children make a smooth transition from home to school, this study examined the home language environment of preschool children in native Japanese-speaking families in the United States. Participating in the study were 20 mothers and their children; half the children were 4-year-olds and half were 5-year-olds. Mothers were observed reading a Japanese translation of the book "The Very Hungry Caterpillar." Transcripts of the verbatim mother-child verbal utterances other than reading were coded using a modified version of "The Coding System for Home Bookreading" in which utterances were coded as "immediate talk," such as labeling pictures; "nonimmediate talk," such as making real world connections or making inferences; or "other talk," such as requesting attention. The qualitative analyses revealed a ubiquitous pattern of the 3-part sequence among Japanese mothers during book reading, a sequence typically appearing in classroom interactions: the mother initiates usually in question form, the child responds, and the mother supplies feedback. Nonimmediate talk is considered to involve the types of skills necessary for school success. Quantitative analyses indicated that the correlation between mothers' nonimmediate talk and the children's nonimmediate talk was close to .90. (Contains 37 references.) (KB)

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Styles of Parent-child Book-reading in Japanese Families

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Abstract

Becoming literate is known as a process that begins long before schooling takes place (Teale & Sulzby, 1986), and the culture of the home plays a significant role in affecting young children's socialization into language and literacy practices (Heath, 1983). A cross-cultural study of Asian and American children reports that the superior performance of Asian children in school settings seems to be related to cultural and educational differences (Stevenson, Chen, & Lee, 1993). Trying to understand why Japanese children make the transition from home to school so smoothly, the present study specifically reports the findings regarding the home language environments of middle-class Japanese preschool children. Both quantitative and qualitative analyses were performed to better understand the relationship between sociocultural background and young Japanese children's development of literacy. The qualitative study has revealed a ubiquitous pattern of the three-part sequence among Japanese mothers during book-reading activities, the sequence that typically appears in classroom interactions: the mother initiates (usually in question form), the child responds, and the mother supplies feedback. The study also quantitatively analyzed book-reading practices. Based on The Coding System for Home Bookreading (De Temple, 1993), these mother-child book-reading activities were coded either as immediate talk (e.g., labeling pictures, counting, paraphrasing), non-immediate talk (e.g., recall, real world connections, explanations, inferences, predictions), or other types, such as providing feedback and requesting attention, evaluation, and clarification. Non-immediate talk is regarded as the type of skills necessary to be successful in school, particularly in terms of literacy and later school achievement. Discussing the results of the analyses, the study suggests: (1) children gradually learn to internalize expectations of classroom life early in their homes; (2) the home-school continuum in language socialization seems to hold significant meaning in later school achievement.

Styles of Parent-child Book-reading in Japanese Families

In today's society, which increasingly necessitates global interdependency, we have abundant opportunities to interact with people from different cultures. Unfortunately, misunderstandings arise because different sociocultural groups have different expectations resulting in different interpersonal interactions. To understand such differences, we need to be aware that the family is the primary locus of children's socialization and that cultural differences originate in the home.¹

Developmental psychologists (e.g., McCabe & Peterson) argue that many clues to language development--literacy development in particular--can be identified in the conversational exchanges between mothers and their young children. In other words, becoming literate is known as a process that begins long before schooling takes place (Teale & Sulzby, 1986), and parents' interaction with their children has an important influence on their children's language development. Particularly because children's oral language begins to blossom in the preschool years (Dickinson & McCabe, 1991), research on the effects of book-reading in preschool years suggests its importance for literacy development (Beals, De Temple, & Dickinson, 1994). To begin with, book-reading activities provide a beneficial learning environment for young children by familiarizing children with print (Sulzby, 1986). Book-reading practices also introduce children to ways of talking about books that they will encounter when they enter elementary school (Heath, 1983). Snow and Goldfield (1981) present ways in which, through book-reading interactions with adults, young children learn what questions to ask and what responses to provide. Thus, shared book-reading experiences are meaningful in terms of: (1) facilitating language development and emergent literacy; (2) encouraging the comprehension and interpretation of texts; and (3) teaching children how to participate in a range of discourse patterns that are expected in later school settings.

Cultural differences during the book-reading event have been addressed, as well. Heath (1982, 1983, 1986), for example, states that children growing up in European

American middle-class, European American working-class, and African American working-class families have different experiences with literacy and consequently develop different expectations concerning behavior and attitudes surrounding reading and writing events. According to Heath, whereas in mainstream (i.e., European American middle class) homes mothers and their children negotiate story-reading through the scaffolding of mothers' questions and running commentaries, in European American working-class families children are allowed less interaction with regard to the content of the story. In African American families there are few occasions for reading involving children. Heath concludes that each of their communicative styles reflects a unique culture-specific perspective toward socialization surrounding literacy. These findings therefore indicate that the culture of the home plays a significant role in affecting young children's socialization into language and literacy practices.

Another implication of such cultural differences in U.S. society relates to the importance of whether or not the language continuum from orality to literacy exists in children's homes. Following Olson (1977), the acquisition of literacy proceeds from context-dependent (i.e., contextualized), oral ways of thinking to the acquisition of context-free (i.e., decontextualized), logical, message-focused skills, such as reasoning and problem-solving. Within Olson's framework, the acquisition of literacy might be equated with that of higher level critical-thinking skills, and the function of schooling is to make children's language skills increasingly explicit and decontextualized. What is emphasized in U.S. society is therefore the importance of the provision of decontextualized skills in preschool children's homes for later schooling (Snow, De Temple, Tabors, Kurland, 1994).

The above assumption, at the same time, implies that if the continuum from contextualized orality to decontextualized literacy is missing in children's homes, they might face problems in school settings (Snow, 1983). Studies on the relationship between sociocultural background and minority children's literacy development (e.g.,

Cook-Gumperz & Gumperz, 1982) have indicated such a possible discontinuity. Some studies (e.g., Spener, 1988) even argued: (1) minority students do not prosper academically because the language practices of their homes do not match the language practices of the school environment; (2) in turn, such a mismatch tends to limit minority students' access to and participation in higher educational and occupational opportunities. As far as U.S. society is concerned, therefore, it is critical to examine possible differences between discourse practices of the primary speech community (home) and those of the secondary speech community (school).

Why Do We Need to Study Cross-cultural Differences?

Ever since Chomsky (1965) began to develop the theory of linguistic universals, researchers have been interested in the human biological endowment that enables us to discover the framework of principles and elements common to attainable human languages. The process of language acquisition, however, could not be explained without considering the significant influence of environmental or parental interactions (e.g., mothers modifying their speech to their children by simplifying, repeating, and paraphrasing). For example, we might be able to assume that what mothers choose to add to the text during book-reading is influenced by their beliefs and understandings of the purpose of the book-reading activity and, more generally, by their culture in general. This assumption, in other words, implies that we might observe variation in interaction styles during book-reading activities across cultures.

In actual observations, one will certainly find individual differences. While reading the book with their preschool children even in one culture, the mothers' approach might range from a straight reading of the text to discussing the illustrations or telling a story rather than reading, to reading with extensive interaction.

As cultural anthropologists claim (Whiting & Edwards, 1988), however, in spite of these individual differences, closer observation will reveal behavioral similarities for those who are in the same cultural setting. Rather than the species-specific characteristics

claimed by Chomsky (1965) (i.e., similarities across people who speak different languages in different cultures and societies), or person-specific variations (i.e., individual differences), finding such population-specific characteristics (LeVine, 1990) is necessary for understanding what culture-specific language/literacy socialization is all about. One can assume that children in one culture share many of their language skills with one another; they acquire a culture-specific model of communicative competence from different types of social experiences and characteristics of their social patterns. Therefore, while paying attention to within-culture variation, in this study I would like to identify culturally salient styles of book-reading.

Why Do We Need to Study Literacy Development in Japanese?

This study specifically focuses on the social supports for literacy development in Japanese homes. This decision was made because, while cross-cultural comparison of how books are read to young children exists, much of that research addresses cultural differences in the United States. Furthermore, data from languages other than English are very limited. We know next to nothing about how book-reading activities in preschool years develop in other cultures and other languages. To fill a gap that currently exists in this body of research, this study examines data collected from Japanese mothers and their preschool children.

Furthermore, my interest in collecting data from Japanese-speaking homes has also been intensified internationally as well as domestically. First, Japanese society and its people have attracted a great deal of attention in diverse research areas, such as anthropology, sociology, education, psychology, and linguistics. One of the common implications of the studies conducted by Stevenson, Stigler, and Lee (1986) and Stigler and Perry (1988), for example, is that Japanese mothers and children emphasize effort, whereas their U.S. counterparts emphasize ability. What is more relevant to the present study is the study conducted by Hess and Azuma (1991), in which they tried to identify maternal as well as cultural influences on preschoolers' readiness for school and later

school achievement. Particularly, in light of the paradigm widely held in Western anthropology and psychology, we tend to assume that a child's success at school largely depends on whether the earlier (home) and later (school) patterns of socialization parallel each other. The language continuum described above is one of such socialization continua/dichotomies, and it would be interesting if we could identify how Japanese children make the transition from home to school.

Second, US society has recently witnessed a rapid influx of immigrants, such as the expansion of the Asian population in the United States on the West Coast. Once again, one commonly held belief is the language continuum; if different languages are spoken between children's homes and the school, communication and/or interaction problems may occur. Paradoxically, however, the superior performance of Asian children is well known domestically (i.e., within the United States) as well as internationally (e.g., Stevenson, Lee, Chen, Stigler, Hsu, & Kitahara, 1990; Stevenson, Stigler, & Lee, 1986; Stigler & Perry, 1988). De Vos (1982) reported that children of Japanese immigrants in the U.S. achieved well in school, despite their parents' limited skills in English. According to Caplan, Choy, and Whitmore (1992), Southeast Asians who suffered educational disruptions and traumatic experiences in early childhood still excelled in their unfamiliar U.S. school settings. Previous research (Stevenson, Stigler, & Lee, 1986; Stigler & Perry, 1988) further adds that Asian children's excellence seems attributable to their home culture rather than inborn ability. In this sense too, studying the Japanese style of interactions would be very informative in order to deepen our understanding of the possible source of cross-cultural differences.

To summarize, because literacy learning is fundamentally a sociocultural process, examining literacy practices holds a significant meaning in deepening our understanding of cross-cultural differences. In this study, I will try to identify factors that predict the different pathways leading to successful literacy skills expected in Japanese settings. The study: (1) explores the relationship between mothers' book-reading styles and their

preschool children's emergent literacy skills, and (2) identifies the relationship between sociocultural background and young children's literacy development. The study specifically focuses on the following two research questions:

1. Is there any association with a particular type of talk between the mother and her child while reading a book? [This question specifically relates to the quantitative data analysis in the results section.]
2. What kind of verbal interaction takes place between the mother and her child during book-reading? [This question specifically relates to the qualitative data analysis in the results section.]

Method

Participants

For this study book-reading interactions in the homes of 20 middle-class mother-child dyads were examined. The 20 mothers and their children in this sample are all native Japanese speakers; half of the children were four years old and half were five. Although the primary objective of the present research was not to study gender differences (or age differences), in order to offer a balanced sample, half of the children selected in each cohort were boys and half were girls. Note that five-year-old children were in five-year-old children's classrooms in preschool at the time of data collection (5 boys and 5 girls, $M = 5;3$ years), whereas four-year-old children were in four-year-old children's classrooms in preschool at the time of data collection (5 boys and 5 girls, $M = 4;3$ years).

Procedure

The mothers were asked to look at a book brought by the experimenter, The Very Hungry Caterpillar by Eric Carle and translated by Hisashi Mori into Japanese. The book is a simple narrative telling, following the life cycle of a butterfly. On a warm Sunday morning, a hungry caterpillar hatches out of an egg and eats through increasing numbers of pieces of fruit on each day of the week, until the next Saturday when it eats through

ten different types of food (i.e., chocolate cake, ice cream, pickle, cheese, salami, lollipop, cherry pie, sausage, cupcake, and watermelon). Saturday night it has a stomachache. On the next day, which is Sunday, the caterpillar eats through a green leaf. Having become full and big, it builds a cocoon and stays inside for more than two weeks. It finally emerges as a beautiful butterfly.

Transcribing

All data were transcribed verbatim. Specifically, the data were transcribed using utterances as the unit of analyses. Transcripts were prepared using the transcribing conventions delineated by the Child Language Data Exchange System (MacWhinney & Snow, 1985). As a protocol designed for language research, Codes for Human Analyses Transcripts (CHAT) were utilized when transcribing (MacWhinney & Snow, 1990).

Coding

Subsequently all transcripts were coded using coding systems. Note, however, that only the utterances other than reading were coded; it would be possible for a mother who does a "straight read" to have no codes at all. The only print that is read and which gets coded is the title, the author's name, the translator's name, and the dedication (which are categorized as "Book Focus"). The shared book-reading between mothers and children were coded using a modified version of The Coding System for Home Bookreading (De Temple 1993).

Results

Quantitative Analysis

Using the previously mentioned coding rules, several principal characteristics of book-reading practices in Japanese homes were quantitatively analyzed. In this section, I first report the overall distributions and frequencies. I then focus on the distribution of immediate and non-immediate talk (Beals, De Temple, Dickinson, 1994; De Temple, 1993; De Temple & Beals, 1991; De Temple & Snow, 1996; Dickinson, De Temple, Hirschler, & Smith, 1992).

The total number of utterances ranged from 26 to 182 ($M = 91.75$, $SD = 48.74$). For the preschoolers, the total number of utterances ranged from 21 to 137 ($M = 63.15$, $SD = 31.10$). Comparisons of mean scores by a t test showed that the total number of maternal utterances, $t(38) = -2.21$, $p < .05$, was significantly higher than that of child utterances. That is, the mothers asked more questions and provided more comments than their children.

The distinction between immediate and non-immediate talk is whether or not the book-reading interaction provides opportunities for improving decontextualized language skills. Immediate talk, which includes activities such as labeling pictures, counting, and paraphrasing, tends to focus on information obtainable from each individual page of the book. On the other hand, non-immediate talk, which includes activities such as recall, real world connections, and decontextualized analysis (e.g., explanations, inferences, predictions), is more global and often considered to be the kinds of skills necessary in school settings.

For the mothers, the number of immediate talk ranged widely from 8 to 85 ($M = 31.00$, $SD = 20.17$), whereas for the children the amount of immediate talk ranged from 7 to 71 ($M = 25.1$, $SD = 16.59$). Likewise, the number of non-immediate talk by the mothers ranged from 4 to 82 ($M = 27.05$, $SD = 22.35$), whereas the number of non-immediate talk by the children ranged from 1 to 62 ($M = 19.25$, $SD = 16.71$). Overall, therefore, book-reading performance exhibited by the mothers and the children varied greatly, showing great individual differences.

The analysis further examined the relationships between the mothers' total number of utterances, immediate talk, non-immediate talk, and the children's total number of utterances, immediate talk, and non-immediate talk. Table 1 displays correlations between these measures. A pattern of correlations that has emerged between these measures indicates that maternal utterances and child utterances are positively related in many ways. For example, the mothers were well matched to their children in terms of the

amount of talk, $r(18) = .89$, $p < .0001$. This result indicates that those mothers who ask a great number of questions and provide a great number of comments are likely to have those children who frequently respond to their mothers' questions and comments. Likewise, those mothers who do not ask questions very frequently or do not give many comments are likely to have reticent children.

Furthermore, the mother's total number of utterances was found to be associated with her own non-immediate talk, $r(18) = .77$, $p < .0001$, and immediate talk, $r(18) = .59$, $p < .01$. The mother's total number of utterances was also associated with her child's non-immediate talk, $r(18) = .67$, $p < .01$, and immediate talk, $r(18) = .48$, $p < .05$. These results seem to indicate that the more the mother talks, the more immediate and non-immediate talk not only the mother herself but also her child provides; likewise, the less the mother talks, the less talkative her child becomes in terms of providing immediate and non-immediate talk. There also exists a positive relationship between the mother's immediate talk and the child's immediate talk, $r(18) = .71$, $p < .001$, indicating that the child is likely to respond with immediate talk to his or her mother's immediate talk. Similarly, a positive correlation between the mother's non-immediate talk and the child's non-immediate talk, $r(18) = .87$, $p < .0001$, implies that the child is likely to respond with non-immediate talk to his or her mother's non-immediate talk.

Insert Table 1 about here.

Qualitative Analysis

In this section I consider samples of several stylistic aspects of book-reading interactions. I also place a great deal of emphasis on discourse analysis, which considers both the mother's and the preschool child's contribution to book-reading activities. This analysis, in other words, does not simply describe the function of the mother's or the

child's utterances; rather, it examines how the mother's and the child's utterances combine to form larger discursive units.

A fill-in-the-blank style. As can be seen in the following four examples, a fill-in-the-blank style of questioning has turned out to be very typical of Japanese mothers. In Example 1a, for instance, the mother reads a question "On Saturday what did the caterpillar eat?", which is part of the text in the book and expects an answer from the child. [Note that I changed the children's names to protect confidentiality.]

Example 1a Tamotsu (four years old) and his Mother

Mother: chokoreeto keeki to, [Initiation]
'chocolate cake and,'

Child: aisu kuriimu to, [Response]
'ice cream and'
pikurusu to,
a pickle and

Mother: pikurusu to, [Echoing]
'a pickle and,'

Example 1b Shoichi (four years old) and his Mother

Mother: nen'ne shiteru aida ni ... [Initiation]
'while sleeping,'

Child: choocho. [Response]
'A butterfly.'

Mother: choocho ni natchaun da kara. [Sentence Completion]
'he becomes a butterfly.'

Example 1c Sachi (five years old) and her mother

Mother: mokuyoobi ichigo o ... [Initiation]
'On Thursday he ate strawberries.'

Child: yottsu. [Response]

- 'four.'
- Mother: yottsu tabe mashita. [Sentence Completion]
'ate four strawberries.'
- Example 1d Miki (five years old) and her mother
- Mother: kin'yoobi orenji o itsutsu tabe mashita.
'On Friday he ate five oranges.'
- ichi ni . . . [Initiation]
'One two . . .'
- Child: ni san shi go. [Response]
'two three four five'
- Mother: un ana ga itsutsu aite ru wa. [Evaluation]
'Yeah, there are five holes (in the oranges).'
- Example 1e Akihisa (four years old) and his mother
- Mother: suiyoobi sumomo o . . . [Initiation]
'On Wednesday plums . . .'
- Child: ichi ni san (the child starts counting).
'one two three.'
- san-ko. [Response]
'three.'
- Mother: soo. [Evaluation]
'Right.'
- sumomo o mittsu tabe mashita.
'He ate three plums.'

A three-part sequence pattern. Many fill-in-the-blank interactions, as a matter of fact, can be included in the so-called three-part sequence (Cazden, 1988), in which the mother initiates (usually in question form), the child responds, and the mother supplies feedback (i.e., Initiation-Response-Evaluation). In Example 2a, for instance, this three-

phase discourse pattern even appears twice successively. In Example 2c, the pattern is further complicated by the mother's move from a general cue to a more specific one.

Example 2a Shoichi (four years old) and his Mother

- | | | |
|---------|---|--------------|
| Mother: | <u>dore otsuki sama?</u> | [Initiation] |
| | 'Which one is the moon?' | |
| Child: | <u>kore.</u> | [Response] |
| | 'This one.' | |
| Mother: | <u>ah soo da ne.</u> | [Evaluation] |
| | 'That's right.' | |
| | <u>happa no ue ni chitchana tamago tte dore kana?</u> | [Initiation] |
| | 'Which one is the little egg on a leaf?' | |
| Child: | <u>kore.</u> | [Response] |
| | 'This one.' | |
| Mother: | <u>ah kitto soo da ne.</u> | [Evaluation] |
| | 'It sure is.' | |

Example 2b Sae (four years old) and her mother

- | | | |
|---------|-----------------|--------------|
| Mother: | <u>kore wa?</u> | [Initiation] |
| | 'What is this?' | |
| Child: | <u>hamu.</u> | [Response] |
| | 'Ham.' | |
| Mother: | <u>un.</u> | [Evaluation] |
| | 'Yeah.' | |

Example 2c Sachi (five years old) and her mother

- | | | |
|---------|--|------------------------|
| Mother: | <u>umareta bakkari no aomushi wa nani tabeta?</u> | [Initiation: general] |
| | 'What did the caterpillar eat soon after he was born?' | |
| Mother: | <u>mazu saisho ni ...</u> | [Initiation: specific] |
| | first of all | |

Child:	<u>eh</u> ringo.	[Response]
	'Um, an apple.'	
Mother:	<u>un</u> .	[Evaluation]
	'Yeah.'	

Western researchers (e.g., Cazden, 1988; McCabe & Peterson, 1991) claim that exchanges of the three-part sequence typically occur in classroom interactions. In their study of Canadian mother-child interactions, McCabe and Peterson (1991) argue that what those mothers who display the three-phase discourse pattern (including the fill-in-the-blank style of questioning described previously) are adopting is a get-the-facts-straight, confrontational style of discourse, which might be associated with the "transmission mode of education" pattern.

It would be an oversimplified idea, however, if we assume that the three-part sequence mainly occurs in classrooms. It would also be too simplistic if we assume that the specific features of the known-answer mother question and the immediate evaluation of the child response give a detached impression. To the contrary, from the observation of Japanese mother-child interactions, the three-part sequence does not give an impression that it is conducted in a corrective or detached fashion. Rather, Japanese mothers interact with their children in an affectionate and friendly manner. Although the IRE structure might be typical of the teacher-talk register, because both teacher talk and child-directed speech (CDS) are employed for scaffolding, it should come as no surprise if mothers' CDS in some cultures is similar to the teacher-talk register. [Note: Following Bruner (1977, 1983), scaffolding means that, for learning to take place, children have opportunities for cooperative verbal and nonverbal interactions with adults].

Some mothers of five-year-old children use this pattern more extensively. In the first half of the following example, Wakao's mother asks the number and the name of objects. It is important to note that some sequences are not full IRE but just IR, although evaluation is likely to occur eventually at the end. What is more important, however, is

that in the second half of the example, the mother does not simply give an evaluation but she also extends the discourse beyond the text--a move from immediate (which is directly connected with the text) to non-immediate (which has connections with the real world):

Example 3 Wakao (five years old) and his mother

- | | | |
|---------|---|--------------|
| Mother: | <u>kore wa nan da?</u> | [Initiation] |
| | 'What is this?' | |
| Child: | <u>ringo.</u> | [Response] |
| | 'An apple.' | |
| Mother: | <u>un.</u> | [Evaluation] |
| | 'Yeah.' | |
| | <u>ringo ikutsu aru?</u> | [Initiation] |
| | 'How many apples are there?' | |
| Child: | <u>i kko.</u> | [Response] |
| | 'One.' | |
| Mother: | <u>ringo o hitotsu mitsukete tabe mashita.</u> | |
| | 'He found an apple and ate it.' | |
| | <u>pakupaku</u> (an onomatopoeia of eating something) | |
| | ------(omit segment)----- | |
| Mother: | <u>kore nan da?</u> | [Initiation] |
| | 'What are these?' | |
| Child: | <u>ichigo.</u> | [Response] |
| | 'Strawberries.' | |
| Mother: | <u>ikutsu aru?</u> | [Initiation] |
| | 'How many are there?' | |
| Child: | <u>yon-ko.</u> | [Response] |
| | 'Four.' | |
| Mother: | <u>Wa kkun no suki na ichigo da.</u> | [Evaluation] |

'Strawberries are your favorite.'

Echoing as a variation of the three-part sequence pattern. Japanese mothers sometimes employ a modified pattern of the IRE structure, by frequently using echoing as feedback. In Example 4a below, for instance, Shoichi's mother initially uses the standard three-part sequence; the second time, however, she incorporates echoing in the interaction. In other words, echoing plays a similar role to feedback or evaluation:

Example 4a Shoichi (four years old) and Mother

- | | | |
|------------|--------------------------------------|--------------|
| Mother: | <u>kore wa nan de shoo?</u> | [Initiation] |
| | 'What is this?' | |
| Child: | <u>keeki.</u> | [Response] |
| | 'Cake.' | |
| Mother: | <u>un.</u> | [Evaluation] |
| | 'Yeah.' | |
| | <u>kore wa?</u> | [Initiation] |
| | 'How about this?' | |
| Child: | <u>aisu.</u> | [Response] |
| | 'Ice.' | |
| Mother: | <u>aisu.</u> | [Echoing] |
| | 'Ice.' | |
| | <u>kore wa?</u> | [Initiation] |
| | 'How about this?' | |
| Child: | <u>kyuuri.</u> | [Response] |
| | 'A cucumber.' | |
| Mother: | <u>kyuuri.</u> | [Echoing] |
| | 'A cucumber.' | |
| Example 4b | Mari (four years old) and her mother | |
| Mother: | <u>kore wa?</u> | [Initiation] |

	"What is this?"	
Child:	<u>hamu.</u>	[Response]
	'Ham.'	
Mother:	<u>hamu.</u>	[Echoing]
	'Ham.'	
	<u>kore wa?</u>	[Initiation]
	"What is this?"	
Child:	<u>ame chan.</u>	[Response]
	'A candy.'	
Mother:	<u>ame chan.</u>	[Echoing]
	'A candy.'	
	----- (omit segment) -----	
Mother:	<u>kore nan desho?</u>	[Initiation]
	'What is this?'	
Child:	<u>choocho.</u>	[Response]
	'A butterfly.'	
Mother:	<u>choocho.</u>	[Echoing]
	'A butterfly.'	
	<u>kirei na choocho ni nari mashita.</u>	
	'He has become a beautiful butterfly.'	
Example 4c	Miki (five years old) and her mother	
Mother:	<u>kore wa?</u>	[Initiation]
	'What is this?'	
Child:	<u>uun, mushi.</u>	[Response]
	'Um, a bug.'	
Mother:	<u>mushi.</u>	[Echoing]
	'A bug.'	

Suspension as a variation of the three-part sequence pattern. In book-reading activities, not all answers provided by children are correct. In such cases, some mothers modify the three-part structure by using "suspension." In the example below, moreover, the modified three-part sequence pattern serves as a preparation for the talk to move from immediate talk to non-immediate talk.

Example 5 Takato (five years old) and his mother

Mother: aomushi ga hora choocho ni natta yo. Taka.

'Look Taka, the caterpillar has become a butterfly.'

Child: nan dee?

'Why?'

Mother: dooshite da roo?

[Initiation]

'I wonder why.'

Child: sooka ippai tabeta kara.

[Response]

'Because he ate a lot.'

Mother: ippai tabeta kara nattan?

[Suspension]

'Has he become a butterfly because he ate a lot?'

aomushi wa choocho no kodomo datta n da yo.

[Evaluation]

'The caterpillar was a child of a butterfly.'

Onomatopoeias as a variation of the three-part sequence pattern. As previous research (e.g., Clancy, 1985) has revealed, Japanese mothers and children frequently use onomatopoeias. In the first half of the following example, the mother uses a simple three-part sequence pattern with an onomatopoeia as an evaluation. In the second half, she uses the fill-in-the-blank style of questioning, which is also a variation of the three-part sequence.

Example 6 Koji (five years old) and his mother

Mother: kore nani?

[Initiation]

'What is this?'

Child:	<u>ichigo.</u>	[Response]
	'A strawberry.'	
Mother:	<u>buubuubuu.</u>	[Evaluation]
	(a sound signaling that the answer is wrong)	
	<u>kayooobi nashi o ikutsu tabe mashita?</u>	[Initiation]
	'On Tuesday how many pears did he eat?'	
Child:	<u>futatsu.</u>	[Response]
	'Two.'	
Mother:	<u>pinpoon.</u>	[Evaluation]
	(a sound signaling that the answer is correct)	

Difficult vocabulary. As previously mentioned, non-immediate talk is considered to be a type of decontextualized language skill. Non-immediate talk is more explicit and requires less reliance on shared physical context, such as the text in the book. Thus, non-immediate talk interactions beyond the text of the book may be more closely connected with the skills required in school settings, particularly for later successful literacy and school achievement. Whether the child can use a difficult vocabulary is one of non-immediate related skills. Examples 7a and 7b indicate that preschool children have already obtained difficult vocabulary such as yoochuu (larva). The life-cycle discussion in Example 7c also reflects non-immediate talk; in this example, modified IRE structures are used because the child understands that his mother expects further responses.

Example 7a Shoichi (four years old) and his mother

Mother:	<u>choocho no aka chan wa nan nan da roo?</u>	[Initiation]
	'What is the baby of a butterfly?'	
Child:	<u>yoochuu.</u>	[Response]
	'A larva.'	
Mother:	<u>yoochuu.</u>	[Echoing]
	'A larva.'	

Example 7b Koji (five years old) and his mother

Mother: nani ni natta no kana kore? [Initiation]

'What has he become?'

Child: yoochuu. [Response]

'A larva.'

Mother: sanagi ni natta ne. [Evaluation]

'He has made a cocoon.'

Example 7c Takanori (five years old) and his mother

Mother: nan te yuu no? [Initiation]

'What do you call it?'

Child: sanagi. [Response]

'A cocoon'

Mother: sanagi. [Echoing]

'A cocoon'

de. [Initiation]

and

Child: choocho. [Response]

'A butterfly.'

Mother: un. [Evaluation]

'Yeah.'

----- (omit segment) -----

Mother: ningen wa donna henshin suru no? [Initiation]

'How does the human being change?'

Child: otona. [Response]

'An adult.'

Mother: otona ni naru dake ka. [Suspension]

'The human being simply becomes an adult.'

un.

[Evaluation]

'Yeah.'

Co-construction as an underlying theme. In the case of book-reading between Japanese mothers and their preschool children, one culturally shared aspect is co-construction. Example 8a shows co-construction based on the fill-in-the-blank pattern. In Example 8b, while the first part is not a complete IRE pattern but just an IR pattern (as matter of fact, the IR pattern is omnipresent, as a variation of IRE), the mother supplies the object of the sentence, the child supplies the number of the object, and the mother then completes the sentence by adding the verb; therefore, the overall structure shows co-construction. (Note that Japanese is an SOV language, namely, a language in which the basic word order of the transitive sentence is subject-object-verb.)

Example 8a Kana (four years old) and her mother

- | | | |
|---------|---|-----------------------|
| Mother: | <u>getsuyooobi ringo o</u> | [Initiation] |
| | 'On Monday apple.' | |
| Child: | <u>hitotsu.</u> | [Response] |
| | 'one.' | |
| Mother: | <u>mitsukete tabe mashita.</u> | [Sentence Completion] |
| | 'he found and ate it.' | |
| | <u>mogumogumogu</u> (an onomatopoeia of eating something) | |
| | <u>mada onaka wa pekkō peko.</u> | |
| | 'He was still hungry.' | |
| | <u>kayooobi nashi o</u> | [Initiation] |
| | 'On Tuesday pears' | |
| Child: | <u>futatsu.</u> | [Response] |
| | 'two.' | |
| Mother: | <u>tabe mashita.</u> | [Sentence Completion] |
| | 'ate.' | |

Example 8b Kimi (four years old) and her mother

- Mother: mokuyooobi.
'On Thursday,'
kore nani? [Initiation]
'What are these?'
Child: ch itto, ichigo. [Response]
'Um, strawberries.'
Mother: ichigo o [Initiation]
'strawberries.'
Child: yottsu. [Response]
'four.'
Mother: yottsu tabe mashita. [Sentence Completion]
'He ate four.'

Here, in a sense, we have returned where we started. As this co-construction becomes more advanced, the three-sequence style becomes less explicit but still exists. [Note: Because of the difference in the sentence structure (i.e., unlike English, which has the subject-verb-object pattern, the basic word order of the Japanese sentence is subject-object-verb), when translated into English, the co-construction might become less obvious than it really is.]

Example 9a Yuka (five years old) and her mother

- Mother: kore nan no ana ka wakarū Yuka chan?
'Do you know what kinds of holes these are, Yuka?'
nan da to omou? [Initiation]
'What do you think?'
Child: kore wa ne.
'These, you know.'
Mother: un.

- Yeah
- Child: aomushi ga tabeta . . . [Response]
'the caterpillar ate'
- Mother: ana ka na. [Evaluation]
'Holes.'
- yappari soo omou? [Initiation]
'Do you think so, too?'
- Child: un. [Response]
'Yeah.'
- Mother: okaasan mo soo omotta. [Evaluation]
'I thought so, too.'
- Example 9b Akihisa (four years old) and his mother
- Mother: doko ga ichi-ban omoshiro katta? [Initiation]
'What did find most interesting?'
- Child: ch tto, choocho ga ne choocho ni natta toki. [Response]
'Um, when he became a butterfly.'
- Mother: choocho ni natta toki ga bikkuri shita? [Initiation]
'Were you surprised when he became a butterfly?'
- Child: un. [Response]
'Yeah.'
- Mother: honto. [Evaluation]
'Really.'

Discussion

Trying to understand why Japanese children make the transition from home to school so smoothly, the present study examined twenty Japanese mothers paired with children of ages four and five. The study has specifically reported the findings regarding the home language environments of middle-class Japanese preschool children. Both

quantitative and qualitative analyses were performed to better understand the relationship between sociocultural background and young Japanese children's development of literacy.

The study first quantitatively analyzed book-reading practices. Based on *The Coding System for Home Bookreading* (De Temple, 1993), these mother-child book-reading activities were coded either as immediate talk (e.g., labeling pictures, counting, paraphrasing), non-immediate talk (e.g., recall, real world connections, explanations, inferences, predictions), or other types, such as providing feedback and requesting attention, evaluation, and clarification. Non-immediate talk is particularly considered to be important because it is regarded as the type of skills necessary to be successful in school (in terms of literacy and later school achievement). The study has revealed that maternal styles of book-reading were correlated with children's book-reading skills in diverse ways; specifically, there were positive correlations between the frequency of maternal verbalization and that of children. Generally, for example, the frequency of both the children's overall and non-immediate talk increased if their mothers spoke more to them during book-reading activities. Likewise, the magnitude of the correlation between the mother's non-immediate talk and the child's non-immediate talk was close to .90, indicating the existence of a strong, positive relationship.

The qualitative study has revealed a ubiquitous pattern of the three-part sequence among Japanese mothers during book-reading activities, the sequence that typically appears in classroom interactions: the mother initiates (usually in question form), the child responds, and the mother supplies feedback. The findings in this study seem to confirm many similarities between learning to talk (i.e., language acquisition) and learning to read and write (i.e., literacy). According to Snow (1983), in US society the specific oral discourse style employed by middle-class families at home, which has the characteristic features of being decontextualized and detached, closely matches school language use, a factor that accounts for the later literacy success of children from these

homes. In other words, because early oral language development can be regarded as having direct influence on the development of later language skills, the emphasis will be placed on the importance of the continuity between oral language and literacy.

The case in Japan may not completely fit the Western conceptualization of the home-school continuum. For example, some researchers (Peak, 1989, 1991) claim that early child-rearing at home and later schooling in Japan do not seem to parallel each other, but that rather, the two different socialization practices of home and school play complementary roles in helping an individual learn how to behave appropriately. This study, however, confirms the existence of a certain type of continuity between home and school in Japan. The Western-type schooling emphasizes the three-sequence pattern (Cazden, 1988), and the Japanese-type of schooling, which is very Westernized, is no exception. At the same time, however, the features of book-reading practices between Japanese mothers and their children should be explained in terms of a larger framework of culture based on the social interaction paradigm (Vygotsky, 1978). Kagitcibasi (1989) argues that non-Western urban families often evolve a hybrid structure in which certain values and practices consonant with Western views coexist with traditional non-Western values. This explanation seems to hold true of Japanese mothers. While inducting their children into a style that is reflective of their native culture (e.g., co-construction), Japanese mothers raised in today's westernized schooling are also subject to the influence of Western culture (e.g., the three-part sequence).

Discussing the results of the analyses, the study has suggested: (1) children gradually learn to internalize expectations of classroom life early in their homes; (2) the home-school continuum in language socialization seems to hold significant meaning for literacy skills acquisition, which possibly relates to later school achievement. I hope that the data obtained from the current study may help fill the gap in our knowledge of the early encounters in a different culture.

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Footnote

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Table 1

Correlations between Mother and Child's Utterances in Book-Reading Activities

	Mother's Utterances	Mother's Immediate	Mother's Non-Immediate	Child's Utterances	Child's Immediate
Mother's Immediate	.59**				
Mother's Non-Immediate	.77****	.05			
Child's Utterances	.89****	.42	.66**		
Child's Immediate	.48*	.71***	.07	.56**	
Child's Non-Immediate	.67**	-.210	.87****	.70***	-.06

Note: * $p < .05$
 ** $p < .01$
 *** $p < .001$
 **** $p < .0001$